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ABSTRACT

Theory and research indicate that cooperative learning methods may provide a way to help limited-English-proficient (LEP) students achieve academically and develop the English language skills necessary for successful classroom functioning. The method involves small groups of two to six students in tasks that require cooperation and positive interdependence within the group. It provides opportunities for face-to-face interaction on school tasks, raises academic achievement levels, and improves intergroup relations and self-esteem. There are various kinds of cooperative learning methods, all of which apply the basic principle of cooperative task and reward structures. They include peer practice, the jigsaw approach, cooperative projects, group investigation, and learning together. Several curriculum packages are available. Choice of method may depend on the teacher's subject matter and communication goals. Classroom implementation requires preparation of the necessary materials; rearrangement of the classroom to facilitate small group work; class division into small groups; establishment of guidelines for group work; teacher monitoring and intervention when necessary; and evaluation on both task performance and group work, which can include class discussion. (MSE)

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Prepared by Evelyn Jacob and Beverly Mattson

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

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Q&A

Cooperative Learning with Limited-English-Proficient Students

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Helping limited-English-proficient (LEP) students achieve academically and develop the English language skills necessary to successfully function in classrooms is a major educational concern. Theory and research indicate that cooperative learning methods may provide a way to achieve these dual goals for language minority students who have limited English proficiency.

What Is Cooperative Learning?

Cooperative learning involves small groups of two to six students in tasks that require cooperation and positive interdependence among individuals of each group. Students aid their peers in completing learning tasks and are rewarded for rendering that aid. Unlike the more traditional reward structures found in classrooms where students who work alone or in small groups are rewarded on an individual or a competitive basis, the cooperative reward structures used in cooperative learning place students "in a situation where the task-related efforts of any individual helps others to be rewarded" (Slavin, 1983, p.4).

How Can Cooperative Learning Contribute To The Education Of LEP Students?

Although research on cooperative learning with LEP students is just beginning, the evidence suggests that cooperative learning methods can contribute in several important ways. First, they provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction among students around school tasks. Current research in second language acquisition suggests that such interactions are important for acquiring a language (Krashen, 1981). Second, the methods raise students' academic achievement levels (Slavin, 1983). Third, the methods improve intergroup relations and self-esteem (Slavin, 1983).

Cooperative learning methods can be used with all LEP students and in any type of program or class. The methods are helpful with students from kindergarten through college at all levels of proficiency, in ESL pullout classes, sheltered English classes, or mainstream classes. Subjects can include English as a second language or content areas such as math, science, and social studies.

What Kinds Of Cooperative Learning Programs Are There?

While all cooperative learning methods apply the basic principle of cooperative task and/or cooperative reward structures, there are various kinds of cooperative learning methods. These differ in philosophy of education, nature of learning supported, kind of cooperation, student roles and communication, and teacher roles (Kagan, 1985b). After a brief description of each major approach, we apply the method to a vocabulary lesson.

Peer Practice. Group members drill and assist one another in learning predetermined content with the aim of bringing every student to his or her highest level of achievement. Examples of peer practice methods include Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) and Teams-Games Tournaments (TGT) (Slavin, 1986).

In a STAD vocabulary lesson a teacher first selects words for the students to learn and provides direct instruction on the words. Next, students work in their groups to reinforce and practice what the teacher has presented, often using study sheets prepared by the teacher. After the groups practice, each student takes an individual quiz. Results of the quiz are used for individual grades and group scores. To calculate group scores, points are awarded based on differences between each child's current score and previous performances; these points are then combined for a group score. Groups meeting predetermined criteria earn rewards and recognition.

Jigsaw. All groups are given the same task, for example, mastering a learning unit. Within groups each member is given primary responsibility for a unique part of the unit. Each group member then works in an "expert" group with members from other groups who have responsibility for the same content. After mastering the material in these expert groups, the students return to their "home" groups to present the material in which they are now expert. Students then take individual tests on the entire unit. Examples are original *Jigsaw* (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp, 1978) and *Jigsaw II* (Slavin, 1986).

In an original *Jigsaw* vocabulary lesson, a teacher develops subsets of a word list derived from different narrative texts. Each group member is then given one text and set of words. Students then meet in their expert groups to read the texts and learn the words. They look up definitions and put the words

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into new sentences. After all students in the expert groups have learned the material, they return to their home groups to teach the others the words in their text. Each student then is tested on all the words.

Cooperative Projects. Students work to produce a group project, which they may have a hand in selecting. This approach emphasizes higher order skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Usually, individuals within each group make a unique contribution to the group's efforts. In addition, groups frequently make unique contributions to the class as a whole without overt between-group competition. Examples are *Group Investigation* (Sharan & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1979) and *Co-op Co-op* (Kagan, 1985a, 1985b).

In *Group Investigation* students help choose the words they investigate and learn. For example, after reading a story selected by the teacher, each student writes down a list of four words he or she wants to investigate. Each group compiles a composite list, removing redundant words. The whole class then uses these lists to create subgroups of words identified. Student groups select which subgroup of words they want to investigate. In addition to identifying definitions and parts of speech, student groups might examine synonyms and explore the subtle differences in meanings among them, or they might compare English words to similar words in their native languages. Each group decides what kind of final product to prepare. This might be writing a story using the words or constructing a bilingual dictionary. After each group has shared its product with the whole class, evaluation of products can be done by the teacher alone or jointly by teacher and students.

Learning Together. This is a framework for applying cooperative learning principles (D.W. Johnson & R. Johnson, 1975; D.W. Johnson, R. Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1984). It does not have a specific method of organization, but outlines decisions teachers need to make to apply cooperative learning. It emphasizes positive interdependence among students, individual accountability, and students' use of collaborative skills.

Holubec (1984) applies *Learning Together* to a vocabulary lesson. The teacher assigns roles to each student in the groups. The roles are *starter* (gets group started promptly), *praiser* (encourages others), *checker* (makes sure everyone knows the words), and *mover* (writes for the group and keeps them on task). Students are given study sheets with the words. In groups, students provide parts of speech, write definitions, complete sentences with blanks, make up test sentences to exchange with other groups, and review the words. After group work, students are tested individually, but each individual's final grade for the lesson is the average grade of their group. The teacher observes the groups working, acknowledging improvement in group skills and making suggestions for improvement.

Curriculum Packages. In addition to the methods discussed above, several curriculum packages are available. *Finding Out/Descubrimiento* is a science/math curriculum for bilingual Spanish-English students in grades 2-3 (Cohen, DeAvila, & Intiti, 1981, cited in Kagan, 1986). While other packages can be used with LEP students, materials are provided only in English. *Team Assisted Individualization (TAI)* is a math program for grades 2-7 (Slavin, 1985), while *Rotation Science Centers (RSC)* is for science in grades 3 and upward (Kagan, 1985a). *Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)* is a reading/writing program for grades 3-4 (Slavin, 1986).

What Should Be Considered In Selecting Appropriate Cooperative Learning Methods?

Teachers need not select just one method; in fact, many use more than one approach with their students. The specific methods selected will depend significantly on a teacher's instructional goals—both for subject matter content and for communication experiences in English. Teachers may also take into account their objectives for development of collaborative skills; the ages, ethnicity, and levels of English proficiency of their students; the time allotted to a unit; and the daily schedule for an activity.

Subject matter goals. Peer practice methods appear best suited for learning basic skills and content with single right answers. *Jigsaw* methods are useful for mastering text, while *cooperative project* approaches are useful for analytic and creative thinking. *Learning Together* emphasizes the development of interpersonal and group skills. (See Kagan, 1985a.)

Communication goals. In *peer practice* approaches, students assume roles of *tutor* and *tutee* with much of the interaction focused around drill and practice. In *Jigsaw* approaches, students may also assume roles of *expert consultant* and *team leader* in addition to *tutor* and *tutee*. Interactions may include expert presentations, discussion and analysis among experts, and tutoring. In *cooperative project* approaches, student roles are expanded further to include *investigator* and *resource gatherer*. Interactions also expand to include planning, decision making, critical analysis and synthesis, and creativity. (See Kagan, 1985b.)

How Can Teachers Implement Cooperative Learning Methods?

After selecting an appropriate method, teachers need to prepare the necessary materials and arrange the room to facilitate cooperative group work. This might involve developing study and quiz sheets for peer practice, or dividing up a text assignment into parts for *Jigsaw*. Rearranging the furniture may include placing tables and chairs in circles or clusters in discrete areas around the room.

Teachers need to divide the class into groups of two to six members, the specific size depending on the method chosen. Teachers generally use one of two methods: teacher-selected assignments or random assignment. In either case, groups

should be heterogeneous with regard to ability, gender, native language, and English language proficiency.

Initially, teachers need to establish guidelines on how groups will function. Students should be told that each group member needs to assist other members of the group with understanding the material or completing the project. If students have not worked in cooperative groups before, teachers should conduct team-building activities before implementing cooperative learning.

After explaining the task and desired behaviors, teachers need to monitor and intervene in groups, both for accomplishment of academic tasks and for desired collaborative behavior. In some instances, teachers may need to assist students in resolving group difficulties.

After the groups have finished their work, they can be evaluated on task performance and on the way the groups functioned. Teachers may lead students in discussions regarding their perceptions of how well their group worked together.

Resources

A resource guide on cooperative learning for LEP students is available from Evelyn Jacob, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1118 22nd St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. The guide lists practitioners and districts using cooperative learning with LEP students, associations for cooperative learning, training opportunities, and current research projects. A good introduction to the use of cooperative learning methods with LEP students is Kagan's (1986) chapter.

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